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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1037
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0004
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0004
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI PRIORITY 0001
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BAGHDAD FOR FCS-FRANK CARRICO, ECON-RICHARDS, POL-HOLT, PAO-NANTONGO
AMMAN FOR FCS - PLEASE PASS TO AMCHAM
BEIRUT FOR FCS - PLEASE PASS TO AMCHAM
CAIRO FOR FCS - PLEASE PASS TO AMCHAM
DUBAI FOR FCS - PLEASE PASS TO AMCHAM
MANAMA FOR FCS - PLEASE PASS TO AMCHAM

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NAJAF ANNOUNCES INAUGURAL TOURISM CONFERENCE, CALLS FOR
INTERNATIONAL TOURISM INDUSTRY TO PARTICIPATE

11. (U) This is a PRT Najaf Cable.

12. (U) Summary. In a February 7 meeting with PRT Najaf, the Najaf Provincial Council (PC) Tourism Committee announced that it decided to hold the three-day tourism conference April 5 - 7, in conjunction with Iraqi Tourism Week, which will begin on April 1 with activities in Erbil and Basrah. The Conference will include panel discussions of technical issues needed for the development of the tourism industry, and a showcasing of Najaf's potential tourist attractions. The planners are preparing for about three hundred attendees, including hotel and travel associations, related businesses, international business persons from the travel/tourism industry, and government officials. PRT and coalition representatives are welcome to attend. Third Infantry Division (3ID) has committed to assisting with security for the conference. This is an action cable. See action request para seven and eight. End Summary.

13. (U) On February 7, the Najaf Tourism Committee, headed by PC Tourism Committee Chair Sheikh (and hawza member) Fayid Al Shimerti met with the PRT to discuss plans for the PRT-supported Najaf Tourism Conference. The Committee selected April 5 - 7 as dates for the tourism conference, which will enable the conference to dovetail with other events of Iraqi Tourism Week, beginning April 1 with events in Basrah and Erbil. The meeting also served to introduce the Tourism Committee members to DAI (USAID contractor-implementing partner) representatives, Jon Weibe and Azzad Saeed, as they will be responsible for administering the USD100,000 grant that was approved by the Embassy's Technical Evaluation Committee in December.

14. (U) The Tourism Committee reported on the work they accomplished for the conference, including the creation of five sub-committees each with its own budget from the grant. The Provincial Government has agreed to contribute USD50,000 to the conference to cover expenses for which the QRF grant is not authorized, such as security and rental of the conference space. Deliverables for the conference will be the announcement of the establishment of a Tourism Information Center in Najaf, as well as new Tourism Training courses in conjunction with Kufa University.

15. (U) DAI's Senior Program Development Officer and PRT Liaison Jon Weibe outlined DAI's role in the administration of the IRAP

grant, explaining that the money would be disbursed in tranches through a fixed obligation mechanism. Contact information was exchanged so that DAI and the Financial sub-committee for the conference planning could continue their cooperative efforts via email and telephone communication. The PRT will continue to meet regularly with the PC Tourism Committee to monitor progress.

¶16. (SBU) Comment: This conference will be an opportunity to showcase Najaf as a tourism destination and a chance for Najaf to display itself as an open-minded, welcoming city. The Najaf authorities are in the process of reaching out to the wider international community, building a new airport, and welcoming international participants to this conference. They have specifically invited PRT/coalition representatives to take part. They have also asked the PRT to help secure participation of fifteen to twenty American/international travel/hospitality industry participants. They have asked 3ID to help with security arrangements at the venue, which will take place at Kufa University's auditorium. End Comment.

¶17. (SBU) Action request: 3ID has committed to assisting with security for the conference. To the extent that RSO Hilla assets are required to support this activity, PRT requests that OPA and RSO Baghdad coordinate that support.

¶18. (SBU) Action request: For FCS Baghdad, Amman, Cairo, Dubai, Beirut and Manama: We would welcome your reaching out your respective American Chambers of Commerce and relevant business contacts in the travel/hospitality/airline industry to inform them of this conference. If any company representatives are interested in attending they can contact PRT Najaf at email kellysh@state.gov.

SIMMONS